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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 004484

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NSC FOR KURT VOLKER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/13/2012

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MARR](#) [IT](#) [NATO](#) [ITPREL](#) [NATO](#) [IRAQI](#) [FREEDOM](#)

SUBJECT: WINNING ITALY OVER ON IRAQ -- CORRECTED VERSION
TECHNICAL

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REF: USNATO 0989

CLASSIFIED BY: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES EMIL SKODON FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)
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11. (C) SUMMARY. ITALY IS MOVING CLOSER TO WHERE WE WANT OUR NATO ALLIES TO BE ON IRAQ. PM BERLUSCONI, AND INCREASINGLY OTHER TOP GOVERNMENT LEADERS, UNDERSTAND THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF NEUTRALIZING IRAQ'S WMD CAPABILITIES. THEY HOPE WAR CAN BE AVOIDED. HOWEVER, THROUGH PUBLIC REMARKS AND A FORWARD-LEANING COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY, THE GOI IS BEGINNING TO PREPARE THE ITALIAN PEOPLE FOR THE POSSIBILITY THAT MILITARY ACTION AGAINST BAGHDAD WILL BE TAKEN. BERLUSCONI AND DEPUTY PM FINI CONTINUE TO STRESS THAT THE USE OF FORCE TO DEFANG IRAQ, PREFERABLY UNDER UN COVER, IS WARRANTED IF OTHER APPROACHES FAIL. ACCELERATED HIGH-LEVEL INTELLIGENCE SHARING, CLOSE CONSULTATIONS, AND FOCUSED PUBLIC OUTREACH ARE KEY TO ENSURING THE GOI KEEPS ITS MESSAGE ON TRACK. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) ITALY WILL BE A HELPFUL PARTNER WHEN PRESIDENT BUSH VISITS EUROPE IN NOVEMBER AND AT THE NATO DEFENSE MINISTERIAL LATER THIS MONTH. TOP GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, ESPECIALLY PRIME MINISTER BERLUSCONI, ARE MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION ON IRAQ AND WILL NOT SHY AWAY FROM DISCUSSING IT BENEFICIALLY IN A NATO CONTEXT. EVEN IN THIS FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT, HOWEVER, THE GAME IS NOT OVER.

13. (C) ON THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS FRONT, BERLUSCONI AND HIS COMMUNICATIONS TEAM ARE DOING A COMMENDABLE JOB OF PREPARING THE ITALIAN PEOPLE FOR POSSIBLE MILITARY ACTION.

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BERLUSCONI'S LATEST FORAY--A SIGNED FRONT-PAGE ARTICLE IN AN ITALIAN DAILY SEPTEMBER 11--CONDEMNED IRAQ'S SYSTEMATIC VIOLATION OF ITS UN OBLIGATIONS, ARGUED THAT THE USE OF FORCE TO AFFECT CHANGE SHOULD NOT BE EXCLUDED, AND AVERRED THAT THERE ARE MOMENTS IN HISTORY WHICH CALL FOR PREVENTIVE ACTION. "THINGS EITHER CHANGE," HE SAID, "OR IT WILL BE NECESSARY TO ACT IN A CONCRETE MANNER, WITH EVERY POSSIBLE DIPLOMATIC AND POLITICAL VEHICLE, AND WITHOUT EXCLUDING THE MILITARY OPTION."

14. (C) LATER, COMMENTING PUBLICLY ON THE PRESIDENT'S UN SPEECH, BERLUSCONI SAID HE WAS SURE THE SECURITY COUNCIL WOULD NOT HESITATE TO IMPOSE INSPECTIONS ON IRAQ NOR TO AUTHORIZE THE USE OF MILITARY FORCE IN THE EVENT SADDAM CONTINUES TO FLOUT ITS RESOLUTIONS. ASKED DIRECTLY WHETHER ITALY WOULD TAKE PART IF THERE WAS AN ATTACK, BERLUSCONI HEDGED: "LET'S WAIT AND SEE," HE SAID. "AT THE RIGHT TIME ITALY, ALONG WITH ITS EUROPEAN PARTNERS, WILL TAKE THE RIGHT DECISION." OTHER KEY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS--WHO HAVE THEIR OWN POLITICAL ORCHARDS TO TEND--ARE BEGINNING TO ADOPT MORE FORWARD-LEANING POSITIONS. DEPUTY PM FINI, LEADER OF THE SECOND LARGEST PARTY IN THE GOVERNING COALITION, SAID IN PUBLIC REMARKS AT THE AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE ON SEPTEMBER 11 THAT, "IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST TERRORISM THE USE OF MILITARY FORCE IS SOMETIMES NECESSARY."

15. (C) PRESIDENT CIAMPI, A KEY OPINION MAKER AND INDEPENDENT FROM BERLUSCONI'S GOVERNMENT, HAS HEWED TO A MORE CIRCUMSPECT PUBLIC POSITION, BUT NEVERTHELESS UNDERScoreD ITALY'S STRONG SOLIDARITY WITH THE UNITED STATES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM IN REMARKS COMMEMORATING SEPTEMBER 11. DURING AN

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OFFICE CALL BY THE AMBASSADOR AND DCM PRIOR TO PUBLIC CEREMONIES ON SEPTEMBER 11, CIAMPI SAID IT WAS NECESSARY TO FIGHT TERROR BUT ALSO TO ERADICATE IT FROM THE "MINDS AND HEARTS" OF ITS POTENTIAL RECRUITS. HE EXPLAINED THAT FIGHTING TERRORISM INCLUDED, IN HIS OPINION, ACTING TO DESTROY WMD, WHILE WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS MEANT ADDRESSING POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND ELSEWHERE. WE MAY HEAR MORE OF THIS TWO-TRACK APPROACH IN COMING WEEKS AS GOI POLITICAL LEADERS WORK TO BUILD PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE POSSIBLE USE OF FORCE AGAINST IRAQ.

16. (C) THE CENTER-LEFT OPPOSITION IS SPLIT BETWEEN THOSE OPPOSED TO WAR AT ALL COSTS, AND OTHERS--NOTABLY LEADERS OF THE LARGEST LEFT-WING PARTY--WHO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT, IF AUTHORIZED BY THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL, IT CANNOT BE RULED OUT AS AN EXTREME MEASURE. THE CENTER-LEFT DOES NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT WEIGHT IN THE PARLIAMENT TO HOLD THE GOVERNMENT HOSTAGE ON KEY FOREIGN POLICY MATTERS. HOWEVER, ON A MATTER OF SUCH GRAVITY, BERLUSCONI WILL NOT BE ABLE TO RUN ROUGHSHOD OVER THE OPPOSITION, NOR IS HE SO INCLINED. ASSISTING THE GOI BUILD BROAD POLITICAL BACKING FOR OUR IRAQ POLICY WILL HELP ENSURE THAT ITALIAN SUPPORT IS DELIVERED AND CAN BE SUSTAINED.

17. (C) TO THAT END, PURSUING THE TACTICS RECOMMENDED IN REFTTEL, SOME OF WHICH WE HAVE ALREADY DEPLOYED IN ITALY, IS

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	SRPP-00
	DS-00	VC-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00
	VCE-00	MOFM-05	MOF-01	AC-01	NEA-00	NRRC-00	NSAE-00
	OIC-02	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SCT-00
	SP-00	SSO-00	SS-00	TRSE-00	T-00	USIE-00	R-00
	EPAE-00	SSD-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	G-00
	SSR-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/012W			

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INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
AMCONSUL MILAN

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ESSENTIAL. FOLLOWING BERLUSCONI'S IN-DEPTH INTELLIGENCE
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BRIEFING ON IRANIAN AND IRAQI WMD PROGRAMS SEPTEMBER 13 IN NEW YORK, AND HIS MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT AT CAMP DAVID ON SEPTEMBER 14, HE SHOULD BE EVEN MORE WILLING TO LISTEN TO ARGUMENTS ON THE NEED TO CHANGE COURSE ON IRAQ, ESPECIALLY UNDER US SECURITY COUNCIL SANCTION. NEVERTHELESS, WE NEED TO AND CAN DO MORE. CONTINUED CLOSE CONSULTATIONS ARE ESSENTIAL. WE ALSO WOULD APPRECIATE AN EVEN RICHER INTELLIGENCE EXCHANGE WITH SENIOR GOI OFFICIALS TO GENERATE DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE RISKS POSED BY WMD TO ITALIAN AND, MORE BROADLY, EUROPEAN SECURITY. RECENT POLLING DATA ON PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR MILITARY ACTION IS CONFLICTING. ONE SURVEY PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 12 SHOWED 59 PERCENT AGREED A "PREVENTIVE INTERVENTION IN IRAQ" WOULD BE JUSTIFIED, WHILE ANOTHER THE SAME DAY SAID 66 PERCENT OPPOSED MILITARY ACTION. TWO THINGS, HOWEVER, ARE CLEAR: PUBLIC OPINION IS IN FLUX AND A WELL-TARGETED, AND, WE DARE SAY, RELENTLESS PA EFFORT CAN AFFECT IT.

18. (C) COMMENT. THE GOI WILL DO ITS UTMOST TO ENSURE THAT THE EU ARRIVES AT A UNIFIED POSITION ON IRAQ. IN THE EVENT THAT PROVES IMPOSSIBLE, OUR ACE IS THAT BERLUSCONI UNDERSTANDS--AND SHOULD APPRECIATE EVEN MORE AFTER HIS MEETINGS IN THE UNITED STATES--THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF DEFANGING BAGHDAD. MOREOVER, BERLUSCONI HAS DEMONSTRATED A CAPACITY FOR LEADING PUBLIC OPINION ON FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES HE KNOWS ARE MAKE OR BREAK FOR US. HE AND OTHER KEY GOI LEADERS, HOWEVER, REMAIN CONCERNED ABOUT THE DESTABILIZING POTENTIAL OF WAR IN THE NEAR EAST. THEIR PREFERENCE IS TO AVOID IT. REASSURING THEM THAT WE HAVE THOUGHT THROUGH THE IMPLICATIONS AND ARE COMMITTED TO POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION--AND PROVIDING RELEVANT POINTS FOR THE GOI TO
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USE IN ITS PUBLIC RELATIONS EFFORTS--WILL BRING PAYOFFS. END
COMMENT.
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